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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2006

In Today's Papers

Orhan Pamuk Receives Nobel Literature Prize in Stockholm

All papers report Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel laureate in literature, received the prestigious prize on Sunday from the hands of King Gustaf XVI in a ceremony held in Stockholm. The Swedish Academy permanent secretary Horace Engdahl said Pamuk made his native Istanbul "indispensable literary territory," just as Dostoyevsky did for St. Petersburg, Joyce for Dublin and Proust for Paris. Most headlines say in chorus that it was "a day of pride" for Turkey, underlining that Pamuk received the longest standing ovation of all recipients. Several papers note that Pamuk declined to participate in a BBC interview featuring the award winners because he "did not want to talk politics." Papers say it's unclear when Pamuk is to return to Turkey. Papers report Pamuk, afraid of possible provocations, said he wants no welcoming ceremonies.

Talabani Urges Turkey for Amnesty for the PKK

A "behind the curtains" column in Turkey's leading daily Hurriyet claims Ilnur Cevik, the owner of the English-language daily The New Anatolian and businessman, has recently brought some messages from the Iraqi President Talabani to Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul. Talabani told Turkey, according to Cevik, not to expect the Iraqi Kurds to attack the PKK. "We have persuaded the PKK for a ceasefire, but no thanks came from Turkey. We were surprised," said Talabani. He called on Turkey to declare an amnesty for the PKK. Talabani also directed a remark at Turkey, asking whether President Sezer had invited Iraq's Prime Minister but not its President because of the fact that Iraq's president is a Kurd. According to Hurriyet, Ankara's "unofficial" response had been that "Talabani is unaware of the facts. He can speak so recklessly just because the US backs him. It is up to President Sezer's as to whom to invite." Ankara also stresses, "We have taken note of the fact that even when severely hostile against Turkey, Syria did not put the PKK leader on television. Murat Karayilan, however, held a TV interview in Iraq."

Cevik, a figure close to the Iraqi Kurdish leaders Talabani and Barzani, has business investments in northern Iraq worth some USD 150 million.

Cyprus Proposal Deepens Political Rifts in Ankara

All papers report that PM Erdogan came under strong pressure at home and abroad, following his government's last minute Cyprus proposal aimed at averting a crisis with the European Union. Turkey earlier insisted that it will not open its ports to EU member Greek Cypriots, despite the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU since 1996. Ankara said it would only do so if EU would keep its promises to end the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish government's unexpected proposal on Wednesday created uneasiness among President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the military and the opposition parties. Chief of the Staff General Buyukanit complained to a prominent newspaper on Thursday that he had heard about the controversial proposal from television. President Sezer joined the fray on Saturday, saying in a statement that he had not been directly or indirectly informed of the proposal. PM Erdogan, in a speech in Afyon on Saturday said he was not obliged to inform anyone about such a proposal which he noted was verbal, and warned that these objections could destabilize financial markets and harm the economy. The Turkish Foreign Ministry, in a written statement on Sunday dismissed statements from the General Staff and the Presidency, and said all relevant institutions were informed beforehand about the proposal. The Ministry also underlined that traditional close cooperation with General Staff will continue.

Meanwhile, Saturday's Sabah reported that PM Erdogan held a telephone conversation with President Bush on Friday and, reportedly, President Bush renewed support for Turkey's EU bid. Saturday's Hurriyet reported that FM Gul spoke to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice over the phone and Secretary Rice stressed that Turkey's Cyprus proposal is a very positive and constructive step.

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Editorial Commentary on Iraq Study Group Report

Writing in the mass appeal Hurriyet, Ferai Tinc notes that the summaries of the ISG report do not accurately reflect the report's real recommendations: "The ISG report needs careful study. It has more to say on Iraq than only sending a message to President Bush. The report depicts the current picture of Iraq, which it calls 'very bad,' but also sends messages to the Congress, Iraqi neighbors and to the international community. Even though the highlights from this report were limited to the US pull out and possible dialogue with Syria and Iran, an in-depth reading gives more than this. Contrary to the conclusions drawn after a surface reading about a US withdrawal, in fact the ISG report advises a gradual growth in the American presence in Iraq, including security training, intelligence training and programs related to economic aid and development. The report clearly suggests that an immediate withdrawal from Iraq will be disastrous for the entire world and asks support from Iraqi neighbors to change the already negative picture. Following the release of this report, there have been commentaries about President Bush remaining distant to the report. However, it should be telling us something significant that Robert Gates whose name is among the architects of the report, has been appointed to be the new Secretary of Defense."

Omer Taspinar of the Brookings Institute comments in the liberal-intellectual Radikal on the possibilities for US dialogue with Iran and Syria: "The report puts primary advice on Iraq policy into three groups, military, diplomatic and political. It is however not clear whether the Bush administration will take the advice seriously. Contrary to the President's rhetoric, everybody believes that the White House is searching for an exit strategy in Iraq. President Bush also stands clearly distant to the idea of initiating dialogue with Iran and Syria. 'What are we going to discuss?' is always coming up as an immediate question at the White House whenever this issue is brought up. Washington is reluctant to initiate a dialogue with Damascus and Tehran because of its feeling of weakness in Iraq. The regional dynamics, starting with Iraq and Lebanon, are moving against US and Israeli interests. Given the current situation in the region, a dialogue with Iran and Syria will only help them to sit at the table in a position of strength. In sum, the Bush administration is at a serious impasse on Iran and Syria. There will be more reports and advice on Iraq and there will

always be search for a magical formula. The fact of the matter is that Washington has already started considering Iraq a second Vietnam."

Turkey Opposes US Bases in Northern Iraq

Saturday's Cumhuriyet reports Turkey has told the US that the establishment of US military bases in northern Iraq was "unacceptable," warning the bases would spark serious problems. The US has changed its plans, and the bases will be constructed in other parts of Iraq. The Kurdish groups, afraid of possible Turkish interference in northern Iraq, have been uneasy that the change in US plans paves the way for an intervention by Turkey. Sources told Cumhuriyet the US could not afford to ignore Turkish sensitivities while using Incirlik airbase in southern Turkey.

Banking Watchdog Wary of Greek Interest in Turkish Banks

Milliyet reports Turkey's banking watchdog BDDK was alarmed by the interest shown by Greek investors in Turkish banks. BDDK had given the nod to the USD 2.3 billion sale of Finansbank to Greece's NBG only because the amount of money to be injected into Turkey was quite high. The BDDK members are reportedly debating whether a restriction should be placed on foreign investments in the Turkish banking sector. Milliyet says that the Greek EFG Eurobank had acquired 70 percent share of Tekfenbank for USD 185 million in May. In November, Greece's second largest bank Alpha Bank made a USD 435.5 million deal for a 50 percent stake of Abank. These sales have not yet been approved by the BDDK.

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TV News:

(NTV, 7.00 A.M.)

Domestic News

- EU foreign ministers will gather to decide whether to partially suspend membership negotiations with Turkey. EU General Affairs and External Relations Council will discuss EU enlargement, in particular, accession talks with Turkey and Croatia.
- The Turkish and US envoys for countering terrorism, Edip Baser and Joseph Ralston will meet on Monday in Germany or Belgium.
- Prime Minister Erdogan phoned Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and Russian President Putin to discuss Turkey's EU entry process.
- The Turkish Parliament will discuss the 2007 budget on Friday.
- Eight people suspected to be trying to join the PKK terrorists in the mountains have been captured in security operations in the eastern province of Van.

International News

- General Augusto Pinochet, who seized power in 1973 in a military coup against the Chilean President Salvador Allende, died at 91 in a hospital from complications following a heart attack.
- German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, whose Social Democrats support Turkey's EU membership, argued in an interview with the weekly Der Spiegel that "if Turkey were to turn away from Europe, that would be a serious strategic loss for the EU."
- The Iraqi President Talabani said the US report calling for a new approach to the Iraqi war contained dangerous recommendations that would undermine his country's sovereignty.
- Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has told his cabinet that the Iraq Study Group report released last week should be seen as an internal American affair and ignored.
- US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, soon to leave office, paid a surprise farewell visit to the US troops in Iraq.
- Palestinian President Abbas has threatened to call early elections

if deadlocked negotiations with Hamas over the formation of a national unity government are not revived.

- The widow of ex-spy Alexander Litvinenko blamed the Russian authorities for her husband's poisoning.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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